Mutrajl is by far the largest, being at least twice as large as Jiddeyil, which is the second in size.

Al-Qurei'a a unit because its inhabitants consider it to be one. Within it, the individual villages regard themselves as independent, and the people even recognize minor cultural differences. For example, it was said that the phoneme *ain* is pronounced slightly differently in Bsebrin, Mutrajl, and Jiddeyil; that the people of one of the villages always marry people from the other villages rather than their own; that the women of one of the villages are more quarrelsome than those of another, and so on. Yet, in relation to the outside, al-Qurei'a is a unit. Why? It is not because of sheer proximity, although of course this helps. The reason is that, with minor exceptions concentrated in Jiddeyil, al-Qurei'a is exclusively Greek Orthodox in religion and is completely surrounded, in depth, by Maronite (technically Roman Catholic) villages. In 1921, Kisrawan had a resident population of 43,104, plus an emigrant population of 14,290. Of the residents, 34,193 were Maronites, 2,859 were Mirwanis (Shi'a Muslims), and 1,050 were Greek Orthodox (all figures from Hitti-Abdeh, 1936, pp. 410–11). Virtually all of the last must have been counted in al-Qurei'a.

It has not been possible to go very far into this study without encountering the phenomenon of units of loyalty and identification. Since this topic will occupy an increasingly important position as we proceed, nothing more will be said about it at this point, except this: Beyond, and except for, kinship and local connections, sectarian affiliation in the Middle East is the strongest bond which can unite a group of people and the most impenetrable barrier which can separate one group from another.

FROM BEIRUT TO MUTRAJL

Placed in its physical and cultural context, let us now turn to the village of al-Mutrajl itself. It might be asked why a community of farmers should settle in such an unfavorable environment in the first place. A tentative answer to this question will be presented in the chapter, "The Patterns of Culture Change." It might also be asked why, once established, such a community should grow greatly in size and continue to function even through periods of great economic difficulty. This is an easy question to ask. The remainder of this work is, essentially, an attempt to answer it.

Let us, now, in imagination, go to Mutrajl by automobile from Beirut. The trip will take perhaps an hour and a quarter.

Between Beirut and the mouth of the Dog River the road is lined, for the most part, with bananas and citrus plantations, and lush stands of tall reeds. Beyond the river, however, the citrus plantations cease, but the banana plantations continue. We notice that water is brought to them in open cement conduits. On the upper slopes to our right, we pass innumerable small villages and their olive and fig orchards.